

BRIEFER ARTICLES.

Natural history specimens in mails for foreign countries.—The following notice has lately been distributed to postmasters: The United States Post Office Department having submitted a proposition to so amend the universal postal convention of Vienna as to admit packages containing natural history specimens to the mails exchanged between countries of the postal union at the same postage rate and under the same conditions as apply to packages containing "samples of merchandise" in said mails, and said proposition having upon its submission to a vote of the countries composing the Universal Postal Union been rejected; the notice is hereby given that packages containing natural history specimens are not transmissible by mail to any country of the postal union (except Canada) except as *letters* upon which postage at the rate of five cents per half-ounce has been prepaid in full. . . .

The foregoing provisions do not apply to packages of natural history specimens addressed for delivery in Canada, the transmission of which is governed by the United States postal laws and regulations; nor to similar packages sent by "parcels post" to the countries named on page 930 of the United States *Official Postal Guide* for January, 1893. [These are: Bahamas, Barbadoes, Colombia, Costa Rica, Danish West Indies, Hawaiian Kingdom, Honduras, Jamaica, Leeward Is., Mexico, Salvador, British Guiana, and Windward Is.]

Postmasters will cause due notice of the foregoing to be taken at their offices.

By direction of the Postmaster-General, N. M. BROOKS, *Superintendent of Foreign Mails*.

EDITORIAL.

THE INCREASINGLY close organization of American botanists is a significant fact. In the beginning of their association the purpose was chiefly to cultivate personal acquaintance and to catch the inspiration that comes from an interchange of views. This has gone on until the great body of the working botanists of this country are thoroughly bound together by personal acquaintance and mutual esteem. A step further was taken when those interested in taxonomic nomenclature took advantage of their association to formulate a code of working rules, and thus turn into useful directions the energy that was being dissipated in the maintenance of differences. The next step was to adopt the co-operative plan of work, and with this idea the check-list

of the higher plants of the "manual range" has been prepared by a committee and referred to the Botanical Club for approval. In committee discussions and in those of the Club botanists have learned the value of a consensus of opinion, and have recognized that it is easier and far more effective to settle differences by arbitration than by war.

THIS LEADS us to speak of the relation of the principle of co-operation to the future of botanical work. The time has passed when any general botanical work should be prepared by a single individual, however capable that individual may be. Every work should appear with sufficient rapidity to insure completeness and uniform treatment. This is notably true in our most important systematic works, which have often been of such slow preparation that a whole generation has left them incomplete. Every botanist recalls the case of Dr. Gray's most elaborate works. Had the *Flora of North America* been pushed to completion by a group of botanists, it might not have been of equal excellence throughout, but it would have brought together all the information of the time, and established a definite point of departure for the subsequent study of all of our vascular groups. Had the *Synoptical Flora*, so fit a monument to our most distinguished systematist, called to its aid the rapidly increasing force of workers, it would now mark the second epoch of our knowledge of the North American flora, and would have had the masterly guidance of its projector, instead of being left, as it is, to an indefinite future. There is a time when details become so numerous that only organization can use them effectively. A general may be able to command a company better than any captain, but still he must be content to leave many details to others.

TO MARSHALL into orderly array all the known facts with reference to our North American flora is more than any one can do in a lifetime, and still all these facts must be brought together in the interest of progress. It is theoretically beautiful for one unusually capable systematist to traverse the whole field and monograph every group, but practically it is impossible. It is absolutely necessary to call in ordinarily capable workers and let them do the best they can. They may blunder, but they will surely get the facts into usable shape. No work pretends to be the last utterance upon any subject, but simply the foundation for future utterances, and it is always important that our information be kept current and within easy reach.

THE CO-OPERATION referred to involves not merely the allotment of work, but also the exchange of specimens and publications. It is impossible for all capable workers to reside at the greatest center of

material, but it is perfectly possible for those centers to equip them temporarily for work. That selfish hoarding of material which fears that some one else will get the benefit of it is not only contrary to the real scientific spirit but shows an entire lack of appreciation of the greatness of the field. It must be said that in this country, at least, almost every botanist is ready to open his collections and his library to all who know how to use them, and in so doing feels that he is advancing the interests of botanical science.

WHAT HAS BEEN SAID of co-operation in systematic botany obtains in almost every field of botanical work. It is a question whether any one man should prepare a complete work upon so young a subject as Physiological Botany, for it is impossible for him to examine the whole field, and certainly not in Morphology. Of course reference is not made to brief, compiled texts, but to monographic work. In this connection it may be said that a suggestion was made at the Madison meeting which would be immensely useful if carried out, namely, that botanists arrange for an exchange of index cards, each contributor being assigned certain publications for indexing, the cards being printed in uniform style and sent to all the others. This sort of co-operation would speedily lead to even more complete and effective organization of work.

IT IS CERTAINLY true that the progress of botanical science in this country, and in all countries, will be very much hastened by the completest possible organization of co-operative work.

CURRENT LITERATURE.

A new high school botany.¹

A suitable botanical text-book for high schools seems to be the unsolved problem of publishers and teachers. The attitude of publishers is easy to understand, but that of teachers is not so simple. The only botanists who feel that a suitable book for such a purpose has been written are those who have written them, and the books in their own hands and in those of their own disciples are eminently satisfactory. Every good teacher has his own method, and it is not at all surprising that no one else expresses it exactly. Professor Spalding is an exceptional teacher and has produced an excellent book. It is intended to apply to the present condition of high school equipment and teachers and is surely a vast improvement upon "analysis." The

¹SPALDING, VOLNEY M.—Guide to the study of common plants, an introduction to botany. 12 mo. pp. xxiii+246; Boston, D. C. Heath & Co., 1893.